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ABSTRACT

A lesson in writing stresses that pupils can choose what to write about in a nature setting. Answers to numerous questions arising when involving pupils in writing can be found in this activity, including: (1) how to motivate learners to write; (2) whether to teach specific writing skills as they write; (3) what guidance and assistance to offer on choosing a topic; (4) how to appraise pupils' writing; and (5) how to respect and encourage pupils' feeling dimension in writing. A student teacher and a cooperating teacher, working as a team, planned a unit on writing about nature, using as their resource a nature area directly outside their elementary school building. Here students, notebook and pencil in hand, were taken on an excursion to observe the out-of-doors. Using their observations on a rabbit's swiftness, individually and in small groups, pupils came up with rhyming couplets, triplets, quatrains, and even a limerick. Pupils had previously studied, read, and written different kinds of verse in group settings. (CR)

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PUPILS, NATURE, AND WRITING

ED 401 542

Where do pupils receive background information to have something to write about? One of the finest lessons I have observed while supervising student and cooperating teachers in the public schools stressed pupils choosing what to write about in a setting involving nature. Pupils appeared to perceive interest in writing since no time was available for misbehavior. Learners appeared to be on task due to seeing the natural environment with its fascinating setting. I truly enjoy observing pupils in a rich environment such as this with emphasis placed upon writing.

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Questions About Writing

There are numerous questions that arise pertaining to involving pupils in writing. These include the following:

1. how might learners be motivated to write?
2. should specific writing skills be stressed or taught at the time that actual writing is occurring?
3. what guidance and assistance should be given when pupils cannot choose a topic?
4. how should progress be appraised in writing so that it does not destroy or minimize pupil purpose in writing?
5. how can the feeling dimension within pupils be respected and encouraged in writing?

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These and other questions loom large within the repertoire of the conscientious teacher of writing. They need to be considered, analyzed, and solutions sought to major problems in the teaching of writing.

Motivation in Writing

The above named student teacher and cooperating teacher, working as a team, planned a unit on Writing About Nature. A nature area was located directly outside the elementary school building. Here,

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pupils with notebooks and pencil in their hands were taken on an excursion to observe in the out-of-doors. They observed a small cotton tail rabbit darting among the scotch pines, planted in rows three years ago. The soil had been tilled recently among the sweet smelling pines, making it easy to see the rabbit. Pupils commented about the swiftness of the rabbit. The teaching team asked if there were additional ways to describe the "swiftness" of the rabbit. In addition to "swiftness," the following words were also mentioned by pupils; fast, rapid, quick, active, skillful, and excited. The teaching team asked who could write a poem of two lines, ending words rhyming, pertaining to the actions of the rabbit. One pupil came up with the following couplet:

The Rabbit
Small and zesty
The cottontail seems feisty.

Many learners were surprised how quickly a pupil came up with the couplet. There was a short discussion about what a couplet is and how it relates to a triplet. Several pupils volunteered to write a triplet. The following was written:

The Scotch Pines

We beheld the fragrant evergreens
We are in our teens
We are not wealthy by any means.

By now, pupils were writing different kinds of verse on a voluntary basis such as the following:

Butterflies in the Garden
Butterflies with their orange and black colors
Fluttering in the fog and mist in the out of doors
Low and high in the blue skies
I see their antennae shake as they fly.

(the above poem is a quatrain with lines one and two rhyming as well as lines three and four rhyming).

The Warm Temperature
There once was a squirrel in the evergreens
Who frisked about in the soil eating beans
What to my amazement did I hear
A chirping and chattering fear
That little old squirrel of great and small means.

(the above poem, a limerick, is fascinating to listen to as well as write on the pupil's part).

In the classroom, pupils desired to compose a diamante by the class as a whole. Th following was composed in cooperative learning:

Animals
bright, active
fighting, scurrying, hurrying
brave, endurance, energy, nourishment
bowing, stringing,beautifying
stationary, motionless
plants

(line one is the title of the above poem; line two has two single word adjectives describing the title whereas line three contains three single word participles modifying the title. Line four contains four single words that harmonize lines one and seven whereas line five has three participles describing line seven. Line six contains two single word adjectives modifying the bottom line noun "plants.")

Pupils previously had studied different kinds of written verse. Also, the teaching team had read diverse kinds of poetry to pupils. Along with studying and reading many kinds of poetry, learners had background experiences in composing poems in a group setting. Now, learners had

opportunities to write poems of their very own choosing on a individual basis. Additional poems written individually or in small groups were free verse, septolets, tanka, and haiku. I wish to indicate a haiku here written by four pupils in a committee:

Pine Cones

Pine cones with needles
Sharp, prickly, quill, round, pointed
Brown, cover, shell, light.

Two other pupils added two more lines composed of seven syllables each to make for a tanka. These lines were:

Birds fly nearby to see cones
They miss hitting a needle.

In Conclusion

Pupils need to experience concrete situations such as a nature area with evergreens and surrounding animals. They should have adequate background information pertaining to different kinds of poetry as well as prose. Leaners then have ideas on how to organize their written products. What is being observed in nature needs to be recorded in written form. Reality becomes a part of the symbols, that is a series of graphemes and phonemes.

At the beginning of my writing, I raised five questions. Question # one had to do with motivating pupils to write. In the above named learning opportunities, pupils seemingly felt intrinsic motivation when seeing the nature area and desiring to write. Question # two had to do with assisting pupils in writing when skills are needed. None were stressed in this lesson; these had been taught previously. However, skills should be taught as necessary when there is a need to do so and a purpose is involved. A philosophy of holism needs to prevail. Question #3 asked about helping a child find a topic if he/she is not able to decide

upon one. It is best to have pupils choose their very own topics and titles. If a pupil cannot select a topic, he/she should be give one based on the child's needs, interests, and purposes. Question #4 asked about how to appraise progress of pupils in writing. I believe strongly in observing if pupils are on task and if they perceive value and purpose in learning; these are important criteria to use in the evaluation process. Giving letter grades, I believe, destroys learner interest in writing. Question #5 asked about respecting the feeling dimension of pupils in writing. A stimulating environment for writing incorporates respecting pupil feelings for content presented in the written product. Negative, judgmental statements by teachers and pupils need to be avoided when pupils are writing as well as when the finished product is displayed.